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SUBJECT The Flight of TWA 847

ROBERT MACNEIL: For the rest of our program tonight, we focus on different elements of the continuing drama of the kidnapped passengers and crew on the TWA jetliner hijacked Friday as it left Athens. We begin with a look at the Shiite Muslims, who hijacked the plane and are holding its passengers and crew in Beirut.

Robin Wright spent four years in Lebanon as the Beirut correspondent for the London Sunday Times. She's the author of a soon-to-be-published book on Shiites in Lebanon, Sacred Rage. She's conducted long interviews with Nabih Berri and other Shiite leaders.

She's joined by Fouad Ajami, a Shiite Muslim from Southern Lebanon. He is now Director of Middle Eastern Studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

Mr. Ajami, starting with you, should the United States be relieved that Nabih Berri has emerged as a key player in this?

FOUAD AJAMI: The U.S. can't be relieved so long as American hostages are in Lebanon. Lebanon is a nightmare. Lebanon is a quicksand, and it's a very treacherous country.

However, in that situation, in that anarchy called Lebanon, the fact that Nabih Berri has control of most of the hostages is good news for the U.S. Nabih Berri is a lawyer. Nabih Berri is the Minister of Justice in the Lebanese Cabinet, for whatever that's worth. Nabih Berri is a man committed to the resolution of this crisis. He's a politician in the middle of a crisis that I don't think he chose. He would like to bring it to

quick resolution and a peaceful resolution.

MACNEIL: But we've just heard him now associate himself with the demands of the hijackers and say that if they were not met, he would cut off his own hand. That is metaphorical language for what?

AJAMI: Nabih Berri has said that he does not condone the methods of these hijackers. He's said, "We don't really want this. This is not what the Shiites should be doing."

However, Nabih Berri, you must understand, has a political problem. He faces a very militant Shiah community. He faces a situation where the Palestinians secured the release of 1100 Palestinians -- many of them are hardcore murderers -- and the pardon of these murderers. And now he cannot do any less for his own people. He must associate himself with the goals of the hijackers, even as he condemns the methods. And he's said, "I don't approve what you've done. However, I will step in, I will negotiate for you, and I will try to secure the release of the 700 Shiah men held in Israel."

MACNEIL: Now, one thing. You've been talking to Berri's office today in Beirut. Is it at all possible that those hostages are still on board the plane? People at Beirut airport continue to say they are, Lebanese officials there. And one insisted today that he took chicken lunches to all of them.

Now, is it possible that they really are still aboard that plane?

AJAMI: Well, I don't know [unintelligible] the hostages is, but I can tell you what we were told from the control tower and from a cleric named [unintelligible], who is very active in Amal. He said, in effect, that these men, the hostages were taken from the airplane, they were taken to West Beirut to a building in West Beirut with their hijackers, that the hijackers are with them inside a building surrounded by Amal militiamen of Nabih Berri. That's what...

MACNEIL: You don't think this is a bluff just to discourage any possible military rescue attempt?

AJAMI: I wouldn't want to second-guess that. I can't say.

MACNEIL: Robin Wright, do you think that Nabih Berri is in a position to bring about a settlement, to get these hostages released?

ROBIN WRIGHT: I think that's definitely not clear. Nabih Berri has two sides. First of all, he has been -- he has

had very good relations with the United States in the past and has a pattern of cooperating with various U.S. efforts. He also is a Green Card-holder, which would eventually qualify him for U.S. citizenship. His ex-wife and his children live in Dearborn, Michigan.

On the other side, as Professor Ajami pointed out, he has a very militant following. And, in fact, there are growing indications that a lot of his followers disagree with his policies. Indeed, the head of the military wing of Amal hijacked six planes between 1979 and 1982. That is not the kind of credential of someone you want negotiating for the release of hostages.

MACNEIL: Would you agree with Mr. Ajami that Berri's motive in this is to catch up, as it were, for the Shiites, with the Palestinians who secured the release of all those -- all the prisoners the Israelis held?

WRIGHT: I'm not sure there's all that much of a relationship between two. I suspect that Berri was forced into this position and has no alternative but to try to gain points both with the United States and within the Arab community, particularly Shiah community in Lebanon.

MACNEIL: Some of the passengers released have talked about the hijackers running up and down the plane shouting about the battleship New Jersey shelling the land when the American Marines were still in Lebanon. Now, what connection could that have with this? And would that be a motive for this hijacking?

AJAMI: Well, you know something -- I mean the hijackers have said many things. They've talked about the New Jersey. They've also talked about March 1985 bombing in a Shiah slum in Beirut which was connected with the CIA. They've complained about this. They've said this is a retaliation for the American involvement in that bombing, which took 80 Shiah lives.

And they've also said the Khomeini discourse, the Khomeini flavor -- you know, America being the Great Satan; that wherever you find poverty, America is responsible; wherever you find oppression, America is responsible.

So they have a general list of grievances against the U.S. And then these particular things, like you're talking about: the New Jersey, and then this episode of the bombing in March '85. So it's a general list of grievances against the U.S., which is a very fundamentalist list of grievances, and a particular set of concerns.

MACNEIL: Can you identify which faction of the Amal or

of the Shiites are the hijackers?

Ms. Wright, can you?

WRIGHT: Well, I think one of the things we've learned from this experience is just how diverse the Shiite community in Lebanon is. You have the mainstream Amal movement. You have the radical parties, such as Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah, or the Party of God. And it looks as if these people are an independent cell totally separate from the other organizations. And one of the long suspicions about the Shiite situation in Lebanon is that there are many, many groups, dozens, maybe even hundreds, running around. And lot of them take their own initiative in following through on -- whether it's hijackings, kidnappings of American civilians, or bombing of U.S. installations.

MACNEIL: Would you agree with that?

AJAMI: Yes, I agree. Because, in effect, we are trying to put names and addresses on a very diffuse phenomenon. I mean the Shiah slums today in Beirut today are breeding grounds for all kinds of things, for money or for belief. It's not very difficult to find a number of young men who will go out and do this particular deed.

Remember also a lot of these hijackers, we are told, are men in their early twenties. Lebanon has been at war for 10-11 years. These are young men who have known no other way of life. Hijacking airplanes, killing people, being killed, and so on, is Lebanon's way of life.

MACNEIL: How long would you expect -- would you expect this to be something resolved quickly, Ms. Wright, or something that could go on for a very long time?

WRIGHT: Well, I have fears that if the hostages really were removed from the plane, that this could go on for a very long time. They may disperse the hostages into different groups so that again you don't have one single target on the ground. And they might then get involved in stages of negotiations and stages of release that could get on into days or weeks.

I think one of the things we ought to point out is that while Nabih Berri does have some influence, the fact of the matter is that he has not been able to help in the detentions or kidnappings of Americans over the past year. There are seven now being held by various radical groups. And while the Americans have been in contact with him almost on a daily basis about the fate of these people, no progress has been made at all in their release.

MACNEIL: So he many not have control over this situation.

AJAMI: No, he may not. And also, the situation may drag on for yet anouther reason. Remember, Lebanon has been --Lebanon is no longer a world concern. It's no longer an American concern. This is one way that Lebanon could again be put before the world as a world issue: Come and care about us because we have become the breeding ground for terrorism.

MACNEIL: Well, thank you. We'll come back.

JUDY WOODRUFF: We turn now to the options, or lack of options, available to Reagan Administration policymakers. Yesterday the President warned the hijackers to release the hostages for their own safety. Since then, as we have reported, the hostages have apparently been taken off the plane and moved into Beirut.

For more on the dilemma facing U.S. policymakers, we turn to two former State Department officials: Lawrence Eagleburger, who retired last year from the department's number three job, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. He is now president of the consulting firm Kissinger Associates. He is joined by Talcott Seelye, who served as a special U.S. envoy to Lebanon in 1976 and as Ambassador to Syria from 1978 to '81.

Mr. Eagleburger, let me begin with you. Is the Administration responding the right way now?

LAWRENCE EAGLEBURGER: Oh, I think for the moment certainly so. I think they have to be cautious. I think they have to be careful what they say. In terms of dealing with this particular incident, I think the Administration is doing about as well as it can.

WOODRUFF: There's been a lot of talk, as you know, about a military option. Do you think they should have even --should they be giving more serious consideration to some sort of military response?

EAGLEBURGER: Well, again, it depends on what you're talking about. If you're talking about taking military action to free the hostages, I think if there ever was a time, that time has long since passed.

I, myself, believe that it is time, and in fact long since time, for the United States Government to announce that, as a policy, we will retaliate for these kinds of attacks, whether it be state-sponsored terrorism or terrorism of this sort, and that the time and the place for that response will be of our

choosing. And then we should shut up on the subject, but we should in fact respond in each case, as we decide we wish to respond. But there should be a military response.

WOODRUFF: After it's over, you're saying.

EAGLEBURGER: Yeah. Certainly not, for instance, in this case, now.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Seelye, do you agree there should be a response when this is over?

TALCOTT SEELYE: Well, I have the greatest admiration for my former colleague in the State Department, Larry Eagleburger. But in this case, I don't agree.

I think that, basically, that the use of military force by the United States is not going to eliminate terrorism in the absence, in the absence of addressing the underlying grievances.

I think, on the contrary, our use of force against terrorists is going to result in escalation of terrorism. And I can cite two recent examples of that: the Israeli experience and the American experience in Lebanon.

WOODRUFF: And you're speaking even as retaliation. We're not talking here about taking military action to rescue the hostages.

SEELYE: No. I'm talking about retaliation. I'm talking about retaliation at some point against terrorist groups.

We saw what has happened in Lebanon when the Israelis were faced by increasing harassment in Southern Lebanon. They then engaged in a policy called an Iron Fist policy, in which they went in with considerable force into villages and demolished buildings, killed a great number of people. What was the result? The result was more suicide bombings of Israeli buildings, officials, more Israelis killed. And it eventually led to a process of an accelerated Israeli withdrawal.

On the American side, of course, we had that very tragic case of the bombing of the Marine barracks in October 1983, which resulted from the U.S. military involvement in Lebanon.

WOODRUFF: So your point is that...

SEELYE: My point is that more use of force by us, in the absence of addressing the basic underlying grievances, is all only going to create more terrorism and more cycle of violence.

WOODRUFF: How do you respond to that, Mr. Eagleburger?

EAGLEBURGER: Well, again, I have great respect also for Talcott, but I disagree with him completely.

I think there are several points to be made, the first of which is the United States cannot be responsible for every sparrow that falls from the sky. To address the underlying grievances, for example, in Lebanon, which is a situation in which the Lebanese can't even solve their problems, to ask us to solve them is, I think, going a bit far.

If the point is to change our general policy with regard to Israel, to be more balanced with regard to the Arabs, we have a foreign policy which is the product of a democracy. I happen to think it's also the right foreign policy. But you cannot begin to adjust your foreign policy on the basis of whether people murder your citizens or not.

Which leads me, I think, to my last point. I don't argue at this point that military response will necessarily end terrorisms. I think it will not, in fact. But the fact that you put people in prison because they commit murder does not mean that you end murder. But it does mean that you respond, that people recognize that there is a cost to doing what they do. And it is darn well about time that people in the Middle East, these terrorists, understood that taking on the United States like this is not free.

What we have seen with this TWA hijacking, I am afraid, is just the beginning of a general addressal of the problem of dealing with American airlines. And I think we need to make it clear that those attacks simply are not free.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Seelye, do you want to comment?

SEELYE: Well, I think Larry has ignored my point, which is the underlying grievances. We are not addressing adequately these underlying grievances.

Let's take a look at terrorism in the Middle East recently. Let's take a look at Palestinian terrorism that occurred in the 1970s. Why did it occur? It occurred because the Palestinians felt that their political rights were not being adequately recognized.

As a result of the hijackings, which unfortunately were reprehensible, they did put themselves on the political map. And as a result of that, the world now recognizes, including the United States, the Palestinians have legitimate political rights. Since that time, their terrorism has virtually abated.

WOODRUFF: So you're equating what has happening now to what happened with the Palestinians. Is that right?

SEELYE: I mean that's just an example.

Now, you go back to the 1940s, where you had a movement for independence by the Jewish community in Palestine and you had a situation where terrorism was used in order to achieve the objective of an independent Jewish state. That succeeded. Israel was created.

But those terrorists, once they achieved their objectives, became responsible citizens because their grievances had been met.

My point is, if we address these grievances adequately and meet them, then terrorism will diminish to a great extent.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Eagleburger, to what extent did this Administration, did the United States bring all this on itself?

EAGLEBURGER: This particular act, or the general problem?

WOODRUFF: Yes.

EAGLEBURGER: Well, I think in this particular act or the general problem, I don't think we've brought it on ourselves. And this nonsense about some bomb blowing up and killing some Shiites and the nonsense about the battleship New Jersey ignores the fact that we also lost 250 Marines and had our embassy bombed and are constantly a target of attacks.

You know, to begin to try to sort out what is the immediate cause and what isn't, I think we have a longer list of grievances, in fact, than the Shiites who are now causing our people.

WOODRUFF: I'm curious about -- you say you recommend retaliation. And yet that has not been, in every instance, the policy of the Administration which you were part of before now.

EAGLEBURGER: That certainly hasn't been. But I think that it's about time that it got to be the policy.

WOODRUFF: How reliable -- just one other question, Mr. Seelye. How reliable would you say, from the American point of view, Mr. Berri is as a negotiator?

SEELYE: Well, I agree with the comments made so far. I think he's the best negotiator that is available from within the Shiite group. He is a moderate, as Fouad Ajami was saying. And he's the best that we can hope for.

I'd just like to make a comment about the grievances

that I referred to. One grievance, of course, is the Shiite grievance in Lebanon: the fact that they're a disadvantaged group; the fact that they have been uprooted and displaced, first by Palestinians, then by Israelis; the fact that the United States, unfortunately, is ignoring Lebanon to a great extent. We used to be involved. I think there's a role we can play to give the Shiites a fair representation in the government.

I think if that aspect were addressed -- that is, give them a feeling of belonging to the government -- that in itself would be a plus.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Seelye, Mr. Eagleburger, stay with us.

MACNEIL: Fouad Ajami, what do you say to what Mr. Seelye has just said, that if the United States would, in effect, recognize the Shiites more, this kind of trouble would go away?

AJAMI: Well, I'm geographically between these two gladiators. I happen to see some of each of their points.

In large measure, the Shiah problem in Lebanon is a Lebanese problem. The Shiah problem in the Arab World, the fight between the Shiah step-children of the Arab World, the disinherited Shiah, the peasants, the shantytown dwellers, and then the Sunni power and Sunni wealth in the Arab World, that's an Arab fight. That's 1300 years old. That's many, many centuries before even the U.S. came into existence.

So, partly, this is an Arab dilemma and an Arab fight.

I'm sorry to see that this Arab dilemma is being played out against Americans. This is the tragedy of this particular fight.

However, we could do, probably, as an American power, as a great power, we could do something for the Lebanese situation. We haven't done it. We haven't been a positive contributor. What we did do. The U.S. did go into Lebanon. It took sides. It took sides with the Maronite groups in Lebanon. It took sides with 20 percent of the population against the majority of the country. And we have, in a way, we have been reaping the whirlwind of that policy.

MACNEIL: Robin Wright, would the United States prevent this kind of terrorism if it were to retaliate militarily, as Mr. Eagleburger suggested?

WRIGHT: I think quite the contrary. I think that the greatest danger for the United States is the use of force. I think this would lead to the kind of increase that would make

what we have gone through in the last three years -- kidnappings of American civilians, bombings of our diplomatic installations, and hijackings -- seem small-scale in comparison. I think there's a very grave danger that the cost-benefit ratio to us long-term of the use of force in this particular situation, either to free the hostages or later in retaliation to send them a message, would be disastrous.

I think fundamental to our understanding of the Shiite phenomena, not only in Lebanon, but throughout the Middle East, is that they view this not as an initiative, but as a response to a long history of oppression, as they see it, first by Muslims, then by the West in general, dating back two centuries, and over the last 40 years by the Americans particularly.

MACNEIL: She says it would only make it worse, Mr. Eagleburger.

EAGLEBURGER: Well, as I indicated earlier, I'm not saying that to respond will stop terrorist attacks. But neither is this an accounting cost-benefit issue. This is people killing Americans. And the United States has an obligation, I think, to do what it can to make it clear that the United States is not going to tolerate people killing American citizens.

This is an issue which I think it is clear at this point we need to begin responding to because it is not going to end.

MACNEIL: Mr. Seelye, how do you respond to that, about what the United States does to indicate it won't tolerate the killing of its citizens?

SEELYE: I think we certainly ought to indicate that we're very unhappy about the killing of our citizens. It's tragic and it's something we want to avoid.

But the basic fact is that we can't control the situation. We can go in and use force, but we aren't going to stop terrorism. Among other things, there are kinds of splinter Shiite and other groups who operate independently. You can hit one and you'll only increase the wrath of the others. And while it'd give us a lot of self-satisfaction, the feeling of being a macho government, that we can go over there and hit people in the head, it isn't going to solve terrorism and it is not going to address the issue effectively.

WOODRUFF: It is only natural in a situation like this for the government whose people have been taken hostage to think about military action, as we've been discussing. But thinking about it and actually carrying it out are two very different things indeed.

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Since the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut a year and a half ago, the Reagan Administration has been talking about getting tough on terrorism. Testifying before a congressional committee last January, Secretary of State Shultz said the U.S., quote, cannot yield position or abandon friends under this kind of pressure. If we allow terrorists even one such victory, we embolden them further, and we make the world a more dangerous place.

But as the country braces itself for what could turn into a long wait for the return of more than 40 Americans in Lebanon, U.S. military options look bleak indeed.

Today a naval task force led by the nuclear aircraft carrier Nimitz is reportedly steaming towards the coast of Lebanon. The task force includes a helicopter gunship, several Marine amphibious landing units, and a guided-missile destroyer.

On Friday, when the hostage crisis started, U.S. officials were talking of two possible options: a rescue mission or a retaliatory strike after the hostages were freed. The Pentagon sent its anti-terrorist operations unit, called the Delta Force, to Cyprus. But any rescue attempt was thwarted by the movement of the plane between Algiers and Beirut. Now the hostages are apparently being held in different locations outside the airport. Military analysts say that makes any rescue attempt even more unlikely. And the prospect of a major superpower once again held hostage to the shadow of terrorism made one Senator, Patrick Leahy of Vermont, comment on the irony.

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: ...is that if Ronald Reagan was given exactly the same situation Jimmy Carter was, with the hostages held in our embassy in Iran, Ronald Reagan would have ended up having to do exactly what Jimmy Carter did. The options available to President Reagan were the same options available to President Carter. He'd be able to do no more, no less.

So, unfortunately, because of his criticism of President Carter in that case and the tough talk from Inaugural Day on, the United States has been but in the position of crying wolf.

WOODRUFF: Are the options always the same for American Presidents? We pose that question now to someone who was in the White House during the hostage crisis in Iran. He is David Aaron, former Carter Administration Deputy National Security Adviser, now an investment banker in New York. Mr. Aaron was Walter Mondale's chief foreign policy adviser during the 1984 presidential campaign.

Mr. Aaron, are there parallels here with the Iran hostage crisis?

DAVID AARON: Yes, I'm afraid there are. The options, in large measure, may seem to be the same, but I believe there are some very important lessons.

The first lesson is that we have to be patient. No one thought four days after the embassy had been seized that it was going to go on for weeks, let alone months, let alone over a year.

We have been dragged now into internal Lebanese politics, indeed into internal Shiah politics. And the prospects for a long, drawn-out situation is quite clear.

The second thing is that we have to understand who we're negotiating with. I'm very happy that we're negotiating with Mr. Berri, but we negotiated with a lot of moderates in Iran and we never got anywhere.

WOODRUFF: What are you saying?

AARON: I'm saying that I think the phone call that was reported earlier in the program, of the current National Security Adviser telling Mr. Berri he has it in his hands to change this situation, I hope he's right. But I fear that what's really going on is what went on in Iran. And that is, the radicals who hold the hostages are using this as a lever to increase their power and cut down the moderates, such as Mr. Berri.

The third is you have to make sure we really have a deal. It isn't enough, in my judgment, now if we're going to go forward in the end and see the 700 prisoners released, it's not enough just to give back the hostages who were taken off the plane recently. We have to get back all the so-called Jewish-named people. We ought to get back the six or seven or eight people who've been seized over the last six months.

And finally, I think there are some long-term lessons. One of them, obviously, is that you don't blow hot and cold on the question of retaliation. I happen to agree with Mr. Eagleburger that it's time that people who do this pay a price. This is a bad time to talk about it, however, because the likelihood is that the terrorists may hold back some hostages just to insure against that situation.

WOODRUFF: How do you think the Administration right now is handling this?

AARON: I think that, so far as we can tell, they seem to be handling it reasonably well. If I had any criticism or any advise, I would simply say this: It is not correct that Lebanon is totally chaotic. There is a major power in Lebanon with major

military forces, major intelligence resources, and major security forces. And that country is Syria.

Syria stands to profit from this situation. They have gotten our attention from our conversations with Jordan and Israel over the last several weeks suggesting that we were going to somehow work something out without Syria.

It's hard for me to believe that all of this could be transpiring with Syria, the major power in Lebanon, having nothing whatsoever to do it. I think it's time we paid some attention to the Syrians and put some responsibility in their laps.

WOODRUFF: So what exactly are you suggesting?

AARON: I'm suggesting that there ought to be conversations with them. I'm suggesting that we ought to, to some extent, hold them responsible.

They've had contacts with these groups, you know, for some time. And I think they have some influence on them.

WOODRUFF: As you know, during the campaign in 1980 President, then-candidate Ronald Reagan frequently criticized President Carter for having American be held hostage to Iran. Do you ever have the urge to tell the President to ask for an apology?

AARON: Well, this is not the time to task the President with that kind of ancient history. But it would be nice, perhaps, after this were all over if he might give Jimmy Carter a call in Plains and commiserate with him.

WOODRUFF: Dave Aaron, thank you.

MACNEIL: Should the United States address itself to Syria, Mr. Ajami?

AJAMI: Well, the U.S. should talk to the Syrians. The Syrians have a good deal of influence in Lebanon. The Syrians are the patrons of Lebanon. But I doubt if the writ of Syria runs all the way into the Shiah slums of Greater Beirut.

If these hostages were held in the Bekaa Valley, they are held in a place where the Syrian Army is present in force and Syrian can command men to do what it wants to do in the Bekaa Valley. In Greater Beirut, I'm not so sure that the Syrians can really deliver. However, I agree with Mr. Aaron. You have to talk to the Syrians.

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MACNEIL: What do you think about the Syrian connection in this?

EAGLEBURGER: I don't always agree completely with Mr. Aaron, but tonight I find myself totally in agreement with everything he said.

MACNEIL: Okay.

On the Syrians, Mr. Seelye, should the United States hold the Syrians responsible and address them right now?

SEELYE: I think we certainly should address them. I think we should address them on a number of issues. One of those issues is how we put Lebanon back together again. The Syrians have one congruent interest with us, for their own reasons, but nevertheless it is an interest which is congruent, and that is to try to restore equilibrium and some kind of measure of stability in Lebanon. And I think that in the United States' option available to us in trying to get involved in Lebanon, we should work with them, with the other factions, the Maronite Christians, and try to reconstitute this sharing power to increase the participation of the Shiites.

I share the view of Fouad Ajami that their writ does not cover all the Shiites. And I think they probably don't control these hijackers.

MACNEIL: Ms. Wright, do you have a view on the Syrian connection?

WRIGHT: Well, I think there are strong indications that the Syrians have lost a lot of the leverage they had on the various militant Shiite groups, particularly over the last year, since they took over from the United States in terms of being the main mediator in Lebanon.

MACNEIL: Isn't it likely that the Reagan Administration, just as the Carter Administration did in the early days of the Iran hostage question, is touching is every base? I mean isn't it likely they have already called in the Syrians and done that? I mean wouldn't that be a logical thing to do?

EAGLEBURGER: I assume it would be. But I think we've been, the Administration over the last several years has been pretty right on the Syrians all the way around. They had major responsibilities for some of the tragic events surrounding the bombings of our personnel in that country. And nothing really transpired.

I think that it's time not only to try to hold some of these individual terrorist groups to account, but some of their sponsors need to be held to account as well.

MACNEIL: Let's go to Mr. Aaron's other point. He said, dealing with the Iranian hostage crisis, negotiating with moderates didn't get anywhere. It was the radicals who called the tune, in the end.

What do you say in this situation, having talked today to the Berri faction, in light of our earlier discussion of how much he controls things?

AJAMI: Well, look, in a place like Lebanon, radicals always will have the upper hand. I mean this is a treacherous political ground.

However, we must reiterate this point: Berri is the only one who will talk to the Americans. Berri is the only one in the Shiah movement who's sensitive to the Americans. So he may not be the best card, but he's the only card we've got.

MACNEIL: Are you as pessimistic as Mr. Aaron about, having now got ourselves into Shiite as well as Lebanese politics, this could go on for a long time?

EAGLEBURGER: I am afraid it very well could. I think it is nevertheless a hopeful sign that Nabih Berri is apparently in charge. But I think there is a real possibility that he in fact will not be able to accomplish much. And in the process, having taken on this responsibility, if he now faces the choice of whether at some point he hands back these hostages, at that point the United States will have no choice but to hold him responsible for having handed them back. So he's gotten himself into the middle of a very difficult problem, I think.

MACNEIL: You mean he'll be responsible to the Shiites.

EAGLEBURGER: If he hands those hostages back now to the terrorists who took them in the first place...

MACNEIL: Oh, I see what you mean.

EAGLEBURGER: ...he at that point has to answer to us, I'm afraid. And I think that's not going to be particular pleasant.

MACNEIL: What do you feel, Ms. Wright, about the --that it's the radicals that are going to call the tune here?

WRIGHT: Oh, I think that's absolutely the case.

One of the things that surprised me the most about the negotiations is that no one has called in some of the mullahs, some of the Shiite clerics. I've covered several hijackings in Beirut and all of them had ended peacefully, largely because Shiite clerics had been called in to negotiate with the hijackers and they eventually talked them out. And it took a long time, but they did all end peacefully.

And it looks as if they have tried the secular route rather than using some of the most important and influential people available to them in Beirut.

MACNEIL: Well, do we know that's true? Do we know they haven't been on to the mullahs?

AJAMI: Well, they have been somewhat less involved. I mean [unintelligible], this mullah who's affiliated with Amal...

MACNEIL: The one you talked to today.

AJAMI: Right.

Clearly, there's a very influential mullah in Beirut who's affiliated, identified, sympathetic to the Iranians, Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah. He's the spiritual guide of Hezbollah. His writ, probably, in Beirut today is stronger than Mr. Berri's. But we have no channels with him. The Americans don't know Mr. Fadlallah, don't talk to Mr. Fadlallah. And Mr. Fadlallah is convinced, from what he's been saying publicly, that he was the target of something, an assassination attempt linked to the CIA.

So, it's not - we don't have open channels to that man.

MACNEIL: Mr. Seelye, do you think that -- following up on another point by David Aaron -- that the United States is in a position to make a deal that would include not only the 700 Shiites in the hands of the Israelis, but the prisoners the Shiites -- other Americans the Shiites now hold?

SEELYE: If the Americans are in a position to make a deal?

MACNEIL: Yeah. That if we make a deal, that it should be a comprehensive deal that includes the journalists and the two ministers and the others who are held there.

SEELYE: Well, of course, it should be all-inclusive. But I don't see us giving in to these hijacker demands.

I know that there's been a certain amount of puzzlement

as to why the Syrians haven't been more effective in breaking loose the seven or eight Americans and others being held over the last year or so. We know the Syrians helped in the release of David Dodge, the former Vice President of AUB, and, of course, the American pilot who was shot down.

But I think it may be that they don't have control of these groups. Certainly President Assad has indicated that he has a humanitarian concern in this regard.

But I don't see the United States giving in to these demands.

MACNEIL: Is the -- let's just go around quickly. As we sit here tonight, how long would you expect we're going to be waiting for the release of those Americans?

AARON: Well, let me say this. I don't think that if the groups in Lebanon are prepared to release all of the Americans and if the Israelis are prepared to release the 700, as they planned to do anyway, I don't think we should be standing on ceremony about who requests, how it gets requested, and so forth and so on. Our scutcheon has been stained in the Middle East by exaggerated talk and bravado and a lack of action. And e're not going to add significantly to that problem by rescuing our people by taking the initiative here.

MACNEIL: Well, Mr. Aaron, Mr. Eagleburger, Mr. Ajami, Ms. Wright, and Mr. Seelye, thank you all.